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ABSTRACT

Ways in which the current economic crisis is articulated politically into the logic of Australian education are discussed in this paper. A major argument is that the dominance of Australian government by the ideology of economic rationalism has facilitated the development of a comprehensive, technical model for the reorganization of the basic message systems of Australian education. National restructuring mechanisms speak directly to the reorganization of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. A revised administrative message system, based on the principles of universalization, standardization, and hierarchization, links training, skills, performance, and reward into a comprehensive, integrated, technical system. However, it is further argued that this agenda is inappropriate for the complex, dynamic, and differentiated nature of educational and administrative processes because the persuasive and critical functions of a properly conceived administration contradict the easy achievement of technical solutions to educational and administrative problems. A conclusion is that the construction of an educational administrative knowledge base should encompass the dynamic qualities of a model that acknowledges the persuasive functions of administration and the critical discussion of meanings and purposes inherent in any complex and highly differentiated society. (24 references) (LMI)

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Knowledge in Educational Administration:

An Australian Perspective

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Economic crises - those of recession and depression especially- invariably produce political, epistemological and motivational crises. The search for meaning and direction at such times surfaces as an acute personal problem for individuals as well as a collective issue of great importance. It should not be surprising that at such times education becomes a major focus of epistemological and political concern, for education is the one great social agency which relates epistemology and politics intimately and directly into the lives of individuals through various forms of social control.

The mechanism of such control is administrative. By this I do not mean that it is simply (!) bureaucratic: that decisions are made and handed down in an hierarchical fashion. Administration must be conceived much more broadly than this, for administration is not solely a technical activity.

In the first place administration is an *organisational* activity. As organisations pursue the effective mobilisation of bias (Schattschneider, 1960) then administration must be conceived not only as a *technical* activity but also as an *ideological* activity directed towards the legitimisation as well as the assertion of control. Such control invariably articulates and confirms certain interests while displacing others. In this sense administration has a *persuasive* function of great importance.

In the second place, this mobilisation of bias invites continuing debate over the search for meaning and direction - of the grounds on which the ideological position a particular administration articulates can be justified and of what alternatives might be possible and appropriate. Administration must therefore be more broadly conceived as an epistemological and ethical activity, in terms of both its processes and its purposes. In this respect administration must involves a process of scrutiny and *critique*.

In education, administration is concerned with the articulation of ideology (the mobilisation of particular biases and interests) into the structures of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment - the basic message systems of educational organisations whose social operations and purposes have been so well documented by Bernstein (1971, 1973, 1990, Sadovnik,1991). Educational administration can, therefore, be argued as constituting a fourth message system, the purpose of which is to mobilise social and organisational resources in ways designed to shape and control the other three. To put it another way, educational administration can be argued to be legitimated through particular power/knowledge relationships, particular regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) which both constitute and are constituted by particular definitions of the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The Australian Scene.

In Australia, as in other English speaking societies, the current economic crisis is articulated politically directly into the logic of education. The argument runs that the current economic crisis is indicative of problems in the production process. These problems are diagnosed as resulting most particularly from the inadequacies of workers. These inadequacies are of two kinds: lack of skills and lack of discipline. Lack of skills must indicate inadequacies in education. These inadequacies are essentially of two kinds. Firstly the quality of education has deteriorated (if not absolutely then at least by comparison with competitors). Secondly, the focus of education has strayed too far from the production of skills appropriate for the world of work.

Remediation of these inadequacies is to be found in the redirection of curriculum towards specific work-related competencies and the universal testing of the mastery of such skills (by both pupils and teachers) through direct assessment. The lack of discipline is to be remedied through the construction of a pedagogy which is focused on the achievement of individual tasks and a reward system which certificates individuals for their mastery of specific skills which are to be recognised in the infinitely graduated wage and promotion systems of particular occupations.

The logic of such an ideological thrust is towards the construction of a particular regime of truth; a particular relationship of knowledge/power. It necessitates the construction of specific forms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

In the first place it necessitates the construction of a 'knowledge base' for each of the specified areas of skill required by the world of work which are to constitute the curriculum. In Australia there is a positively Gadarene rush to towards the mobilisation of this particular bias. The Finn Report (1991) which advocates just such a reconstruction of post compulsory education, has been passed on to the Mayer Committee (1992) for implementation. The Australian Education Council (the council of state and federal ministers) has set up the (national) Curriculum Corporation and parceled out to various states the responsibilities for particular components of a national curriculum. The Australian Council for Educational Research has been reconstituted and given the task of developing national assessment procedures. The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training has established the 'National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning' as a vehicle through which curricular, pedagogical and assessment issues are to be integrated with career restructuring for teachers and the integration of state initiatives into a nationwide program. The Skills Formation Council has authorised the Carmichael Report which extends the process to Technical and Further Education and the Higher Education Council is seeking national definitions of the competencies required by professional bodies of the training programs in Higher Education while the Commonwealth Minister has initiated a 'quality reference' which seeks to ensure that universities lift their (teaching) game. The Schools Council has taken something of a lead in this as far as teachers are concerned with a

series of reports on 'Australia's teachers'(1990) 'Teacher Quality' (1989), and most particularly 'A National Professional Body for Teachers' (1991) one of whose tasks would be to define the hierarchy of competencies (here called standards) required of teachers at particular stages of their careers and to control progression through this hierarchy by various methods of certification.

The epistemology which informs this particular approach to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is substantially different from that which has informed the debate during the past few decades. While the previous debate was couched in terms of either the internal logic of fields of knowledge (Hirst, 1974, Bloom, 1956) or the great traditions of particular cultures (Leavis, 1955) the current proposition is that essential knowledge is related to vocation and should be constructed as a 'knowledge base' in relation to particular occupations. Or, to put it another way, that selection of knowledge from the universe available which is to constitute the curriculum should be shaped according to that which is useful to the world of work. Some of the required skills (note the slippage between the idea of knowledge and skills) are generic (being able to read) some are specific (being able to use a computerised spreadsheet program). What is necessary is their identification and articulation into a clearly defined curriculum. This is to be sequentialised, hierarchised and made easily assessable in terms of *performance* and in terms of *relevance* to the various worlds of work.

The project is reminiscent of (and in a totally unconscious way is derivative of) the Enlightenment project of the Encyclopaedists who set out to map the whole world of human knowledge. But while Diderot pursued the whole of human knowledge Carmichael and Co pursue only really 'useful' knowledge - knowledge related to production. This (only slightly) more restricted challenge is likely, however, to suffer much the same fate.

Diderot failed because the rate of production of knowledge outstripped the processes of its codification. He failed because the construction of an encyclopedia involves an attempt to describe a dynamic process in a static form. He also failed because the resources required to construct such an encyclopedia are paradoxically greater than those required to construct the totality of human knowledge (to which of course the Encyclopedia was itself a contribution).

Diderot's project was doomed to failure. Carmichael's project may, however, be doomed to success. It has certainly become a very powerful ideological tool in the mobilisation of educational resources in the service of very particular social interests.

These interests are largely those which benefit from a particular organisation of the economy. Pusey (1991) has displayed the ways in which a particular social formation within Economics as a discipline instantiated a particular economic view within Australian Government which corrupted the social responsibilities of government in ways which construed the economy, not as a tool of government subject to overall social policy goals directed towards the welfare of the people as a whole (as is typically the case in non-Anglo Saxon Europe for instance) but as

the object and purpose of government policy itself. This ideology, which Pusey labels 'Economic Rationalism' with its attendant rhetoric (free competition, level playing fields, market discipline, natural advantage etc.) argues at one and the same time for the deregulation of market activity and social policy on the one hand and for the standardisation of physical and social infrastructure on the other. (It is not coincidental that the ascendancy of this ideology has coincided with a massive increase in inequality of wealth in Australian society (Raskell, 1992)).

The contradictions of this position notwithstanding, educational policy in Australia is emerging as an attempt to construct an 'Educational rationalism' which will serve the wider 'Economic rationalism' of current government policy. The principles of this process in education as in industry are universalisation, standardisation and hierarchisation.

In industry the process is called micro-economic reform. It sets out to address some fairly obvious inefficiencies in the infra structure of Australian society. These have risen historically from the different decisions made by different states with regard to such matters as the particular gauge of state railway systems. The result is a variety of incompatible rail gauges, rolling stock, materials handling equipment, packaging standards etc so that freight and passengers have frequently to be decanted at state borders. Similar differences exist with regard to food standards, pharmaceutical standards, standards for manufactured goods etc. Moreover, as the Special Premier's Conference observed in 1991 the professions also have differing licensing and registration requirements between the states. Universalisation of these requirements across Australia does seem an obvious step to take.

This step can only be taken, however, through processes of standardisation. If each state has different standards the problem of whose standards are to prevail is complex and subject to very substantial costs for those states which are required to adopt new standards for infrastructure. The cost of changing the plant and equipment of a state rail system from broad to standard gauge or vice versa runs inevitably to billions of dollars. Standardisation in the professions is also a more complex matter than it might seem on the surface. For instance, as legal decision is frequently argued on the basis of precedent, if different precedents exist in different states, which set is to prevail in the standardisation of the system as a whole? Moreover, underlying the process of standardisation is always the issue of states rights versus the powers of the Commonwealth - a matter which has been controversial since federation in 1928.

When the processes of micro-economic reform are directed towards the infra-structure of work, additional difficulties arise. The negotiation of differing awards in different states for workers engaged in essentially the same work leads to great difficulty in the processes of universalisation and standardisation of employment even within single industries despite a century of centralised wage fixing procedures. In industry the difficulty is being tackled by the National Training Board through the development, endorsement and implementation of 'core competency standards' at both occupation and industry levels and the establishment of approved competency setting bodies for each occupation and profession' (National Training Board 1991). These competency standards are being established

at a number of levels which are seen as essential definitions in the process of award restructuring which is dependent on the creation of a nexus between training, skills and rewards aimed at improving career paths and opportunities for advancement. This nexus is to be created through matching hierarchies of training, competence, opportunity and reward.

This is certainly a systematic approach to the issues. It may well have some advantages and offer some greater efficiencies. Obviously a consistent approach to the gauge of railways would facilitate the movement of goods. However, reorganising work and profession in the same manner, arguing by analogy, may be a serious mistake.

The processes of codification of knowledge, skill, competence, classification and reward and the administration of such an integrated system sound logical. The logic is, however, a *technical* logic. That is, it is partial and incomplete and most especially ignores several key characteristics of the world of work, profession and society.

While it may be true that certain kinds of work change only marginally over quite long periods of time it is much more characteristic of contemporary work that the technology and organisation of work changes quite rapidly. Such changes demand a constant redefinition of tasks and competencies with attendant reclassification and adjustment of skill and reward hierarchies. Moreover, while particular skills might well be specified for a particular job it is increasingly characteristic of successful firms that their success is built upon workers going beyond the skill and performance requirements of a particular position. Creativity and the imaginative development of skill and performance in new ways is of immeasurable assistance in the development of industry. It is also a hallmark of the professions. As I have argued elsewhere (Bates, 1991), a system of contract which specifies minimum performance and locks that performance in for prolonged periods is more of a handicap than a virtue in both industry and education. The Schools Council recognises that this difficulty is particularly acute in education:

> The 'competency based standards' model proposed by the National Training Board has been criticised by teachers and others associated with the profession as promoting behaviouristic task-oriented standards related to pre-conceived outcomes. This approach is inimical to the complexities of teachers' work and the variety of contextual factors that confound a simple input-output analysis of what makes an effective teacher (1991:4).

Nonetheless, the Schools Council goes on to suggest that while competencies may not be on the agenda, nonetheless,standards, appraisal, criteria for advancement etc need to be articulated for 'all levels of the profession' partly in order to extend the range of career options open to teachers.

One mechanism for such an extension of career is the reclassification of teachers into probationary, ordinary, and various levels of advanced skills teachers. A significant difficulty has arisen here, especially with regard to the various categories of advanced skills teachers that have been proposed.

In Victoria, for instance, the Industrial Relations Commission has declined to approve levels two and three of the Advanced Skills Teacher categories on the grounds that the differences between levels one, two and three are ambiguous and indistinct. This is hardly surprising as the skills required by teachers are the skills required by teachers. As these are as much about judgement, reflection and intuitive practice in indeterminate situations as they are about specific describable tasks and skills it is not inconceivable that a 'good' probationary teacher might be as effective (and in some circumstances might even be more effective) than an Advanced Skills Teacher suffering from burnout and ennui.

The one significant difference which is traditionally acknowledged in education is that between classroom practice and administration, administration being seen as the path of career development within the profession. It would seem natural therefore to base the hierarchy of competencies in education on this progression. However, one of the recognised problems of the profession is the encouragement such a hierarchy gives to good teachers to leave the classroom thus diminishing the effectiveness of classroom practice as a whole.

Another difficulty is that the traditional distinction between teaching and administration is breaking down under attempts to involve teachers more in decision-making processes regarding the fundamental message systems of schools. In Victoria especially, the role of curriculum and administration committees in establishing a more broadly based and more widely informed structure for school decision making has diffused administrative practice throughout the school. Thus the distinction between teachers and administrators is breaking down. Administration - especially the management of the curricular, pedagogical and assessment systems of the school- is something that everybody does.

Thus the situation in which schools and teachers find themselves is much more ambiguous, diffuse, imprecise, dynamic and contingent than the suggested model of universalisation, standardisation and hierarchisation proposed by the educational rationalists would suggest.

Knowledge and Administration.

The above discussion suggests two models for relating knowledge with administration. The first is one driven by the technical rationality of the processes of economic, social and occupational rationalisation suggested by the National Training Board, the Special Premiers Conference and the Schools Council (albeit with some reservations). This assumes the establishment and definition of an occupational 'knowledge base' which, through the processes of codification can be universalised, standardised and hierarchised in ways which facilitate the creation of a more or less precise nexus between training, skills and rewards. Clearly such a knowledge base would include the specification of hierarchies of skills in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and for some levels, administration as well. In this fourth message system the specific technical knowledge in the first three message systems would be integrated by the mechanisms of administrative control in such a way as to ensure efficiency, compliance and performance.

The problem with this model is that curriculum is a dynamic field which is constructed as much through argument and debate as it is by the precise and agreed definition of particular fields. Physics, mathematics, literature, social studies are constructed through controversy and will simply not stand still long enough for the encyclopaedists to complete their work. Moreover, the pedagogy most appropriate for the encouragement of understanding of the arguments that constitute the curriculum is also controversial. It is by no means clear what specific pedagogical skills are most suited to the development of particular kinds of learning. Again, the diversity of pedagogical contexts, pupil characteristics and curricular possibilities does little to allow a definitive specification of appropriate assessment practices.

In such circumstances it is not impossible to define a knowledge base for educational administration. But the definition reached would inevitably be partial and incomplete and would more likely than not enshrine past and current practice as the standard for performance. The logic of such a process is precisely the logic of the Theory Movement in educational administration in which the empirical description of what *is* becomes the criterion for the specification of what *should be*. The model is open to all of the criticisms leveled against the the theory movement by Greenfield (1991), Bates(1982) and Evers and Lakomski (1991) among others.

The second model of the relationship between knowledge and administration develops in part from the critical observations made above in regard to the technical model of administration. It regards administration as both a practical and a reflective activity. It is *practical* in the sense that it is constructed through practice. Administration is inevitably worked through in particular social and cultural circumstances. These are often quite specific. Moreover they are also highly differentiated. In Australia, as elsewhere, differences of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion and geography produce significant differences in the composition and organisation of particular communities and their educational organisations. In practice, the shaping of the message systems of schools is administratively differentiated in ways which accommodate these differences. Moreover the teaching population is also highly differentiated. Some 216,000 school teachers collectively display an astonishing diversity of curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, cultural and social skills and attitudes. Moreover this diversity itself produces a continuing debate over the nature and justification of particular practices. Some debates, such as that over the nature and purpose of education for girls and the disadvantages they experience within a curricular, pedagogical and evaluative system which sustains an essentially patriarchal disposition of knowledge, evaluation and reward connected to a network of masculine occupations and prerogatives in the wider society, are pervasive. They are, however, articulated differently in different institutions and have markedly different effects on the message systems of schools. They also connect statements of fact (about current practice for instance) which are themselves contested with statements of value (regarding alterations to practice that might guarantee the rights of women for instance) in ways which are themselves controversial.

Administration in such a context can only be construed as a solely technical activity by those who wish to maintain the historic separation of

administrative activity from the cultural concerns of the surrounding societies. If, however, administration more generously conceived is both *persuasive* in its mobilisation of bias and *critical* in its consideration of alternatives, as was argued earlier in this paper, then the knowledge base for educational administration must be expanded well beyond a simply technical definition.

The reconstruction of such a knowledge base for educational administration is making considerable progress in Australia. I have outlined in detail in a previous paper the extensive groundwork of the paradigm which is emerging in the Australian context (Bates 1988) since which time further major contributions have been made, most particularly by Evers and Lakomski (1991) and Rizvi (1991a, 1991b). Further substantial contributions to both technical and critical models have been made by Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989) and Macpherson and Weeks (eds.,1990).

Conclusion.

I have argued that the dominance of Australian government by the ideology of economic rationalism has led to the development of a comprehensive technical model for the reorganisation of the basic message systems of education. The structural efficiency principle, when applied to education has led to the development of mechanisms for the reshaping of education on a national basis. These mechanisms speak directly to the reorganisation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and a restructured administrative message system which attempts the universalisation, standardisation and hierarchisation of the message systems of education in ways which link training, skills, performance and reward into a comprehensive integrated technical system. I have also argued that the surface appeal of this agenda is belied by the complex, dynamic, contingent, highly differentiated and indeterminate nature of educational and administrative processes. I have also argued that the persuasive and critical functions of a properly conceived administration (educational or otherwise) contradict the easy achievement of technical solutions to administrative and educational problems. In conclusion I hope to have demonstrated that the construction of a knowledge base for educational administration should not be restricted to a technical model but must encompass the dynamic qualities of a model informed by an acknowledgment of the persuasive functions of administration and of the critical discussion of meanings a purposes which characterises any complex and highly differentiated society such as Australia.

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